

Repping Jesus in an Anti-Authoritarian World

1 Peter 2:13-25; March 8, 2020

Introduction and Context Notes:

- Last Sunday Tanner unpacked 1 Peter 2:11-12 which sets the trajectory for rightly understanding the passage we are going to look at today. One of the main things he challenged us with is this:
 - Our lives are to be windows people can look through to “see” God at work in us and through us.
- Here’s our question today: how can our lives, and in particular the way we respond to authority and even injustice be windows for people to see the glory of God.

The problem: we live in an anti-authoritarian world (we’re skeptical).

- Authority has been abused.
 - The #MeToo Movement: sexual abuse from the fashion industry and Hollywood to the church to the marketplace to the classroom and to government.
 - People in places of authority abusing that authority. This is why many are skeptical of authority.
- The nature of sin leads us to reject authority.
 - Satan tempted Eve with these words: “You will be like God.”
 - We have all rejected God as king to be our own kings. We don’t like someone telling us what to do or how to live. We prefer to follow our own desires and run things our own way, without God. We all act like little gods, with our own crowns, competing with one another.
 - What I’ve just described, this rebellious and self-sufficient attitude; that’s what sin is.

The solution: the gospel. Jesus turns rebels into children of God and friends of God. Coming to Jesus means putting my crown down and making Jesus my King. This is what it means when we say, “Jesus is Lord.” I’m relinquishing my right to rule and reign and I’m now saying, “Your kingdom come. Your will be done.” You “Seek first the kingdom of God.”

The point: Submitting to God’s Authority frees you to Submit to Earthly Authority

Read 1 Peter 2:13-25

I. Submit to Authority as Freed Servants of God (13-17).

The main verb and central theme for our entire passage is “be subject” or “submit” (13, 18).

- To submit means more than to just honor or respect, it means to obey (see 1 Pet. 3:5-6).

Be subject “...to every human institution”

- He’s not calling believers to submit to “every human being.”

- The context clarifies what he’s talking about: “whether it be to the emperor as supreme, or to governors as sent by him...”

Reasons for Submission:

- God is King of kings and Lord of lords. He is sovereign over all earthly authority (Ps. 22:28; 24:1).
 - This is why Peter uses the language of “every human institution.”
 - Every human institution is a *created* institution.
 - Which means: it won’t last forever. Emperors and governors will retire and die.
 - God’s kingdom remains reign forever.
- God has ordained all governing authorities for the good of humans.
 - The text here says that governing authorities are to punish wrong doers and praise those who do good (2:14).
 - Without government, there would be anarchy and evil would run rampant.
 - In general, government should be seen as a blessing from God (cf. Rom. 13:1, 3-4).
 - Thank those who work in government.
 - The implication:
 - In general, disobedience to governing authorities is disobedience to God (cf. Rom. 13:1-2, 7).
 - Peter says, “For this is the will of God” (2:15).
 - Paul in Romans 13:2 says, “Therefore whoever resists the authorities resists what God has appointed.”
- Our obedience to governing authorities silences the slanderous attacks of those who oppose us (cf. 2:15).
 - By doing good and obeying, we will minimize the slanderous attacks against us.
 - Why? Because there will be no ground for criticism against us.
 - By my good conduct, I can remove barriers for people coming to Jesus.
- Summary:
 - Generally, Christians should be *inclined* to submit to and obey governing authors.
 - Example:
 - The new “Hands Free Device Law”

One caveat:

- There are exceptions when we must disobey (see also Dan. 3:18; Exod. 1:17, 20-21).

“So they called them and charged them not to speak or teach at all in the name of Jesus. But Peter and John answered them, ‘Whether it is right in the sight of God to listen to you rather than to God, you must judge, for we cannot but speak of what we have seen and heard.’” (Acts 4:18-20 ESV)

“But Peter and the apostles answered, “We must obey God rather than men.” (Acts 5:29 ESV)

- This is what Peter is alluding to in the beginning when he says, “for the Lord’s sake...”
 - God is the supreme authority. Human authority is not ultimate.
 - It’s out of reverence for and submission to God that we obey earthly authorities.
- If governments demand things that are contrary to God’s will, then we must refuse to obey.
- RHC Statement of Faith: Liberty of Conscience

The Practicalities of Submission (16-18):

- Three phrases explain how Christians should operate regarding submission to authorities. In each of these, the implied verb is “be subject/submit” and not “live.”
- Submit as freed followers of Jesus
 - The blood of Jesus has freed you from being enslaved to sin (cf. 1:18-19).
- Submit not using your freedom as an excuse to indulge in evil
 - We are freed in order to devote our lives to good works.
 - We obey authorities out of strength and freedom.
- Submit as servants of God.
 - We are free to serve God and live underneath his authority.
 - We are God’s servants first.

Four connected commands (these are all imperatives):

- How do you engage in the following relationships in a way that displays the glory of God?
- Honor everyone (cf. Rom. 12:10).
 - Treat every person with dignity as image bearers (Gen 1:26-27).
- Love the brotherhood (family of believers)
 - There is a special bond between fellow believers. There is a familial love.
- Fear God.
 - The emperor is to be honored, but God is to be feared (cf. 1:17).
- Honor the emperor.

Pay to all what is owed to them: taxes to whom taxes are owed, revenue to whom revenue is owed, respect to whom respect is owed, honor to whom honor is owed. (Rom. 13:7 ESV)

- Paul wrote the above words while under the reign of Roman rulers. Yet, he still exhorted believers to display honor and respect.
- We are to show honor to people and leaders, even if they are not fully admirable. In other words, our honor isn’t contingent upon them deserving it.
- Tim Challies has a some helpful thoughts related to honor:
 - Distinguish between honor and obedience
 - We can disobey and still give honor.
 - Distinguish between the person and the position.

- We can honor the position even when there isn't anything honorable in the person.
- Distinguish between honor and agreement.
 - We can honor someone without approving everything they have done.
- Distinguish between honor and enabling.
 - We can honor without enabling sin or sinful patterns or covering up evil.

II. Endure Injustice Following the Example of Christ (18-25).

This second section on submission is directed at “servants,” or “slaves.”

- Slaves were to be subject to their masters.

A Sidebar on “Slavery” in the Bible:

- Slavery in the Greco-Roman world was different than the slavery in the US which was based on race. Someone became a slave by being captured in war, being kidnapped or by being born into a slave household. Some even chose to sell themselves into slavery in order to survive financially.
- There's no doubt that most slaves probably lived really hard lives and could suffer mistreatment at the hands of their masters.
- The New Testament doesn't criticize the institution of slavery but it doesn't commend it either. It primarily addresses readers in the context in which they lived and calls for a godly response (cf. Eph. 6:5-9; Col. 3:22-25; 1 Tim. 6:1-2; Titus 2:9-10; 1 Cor. 7:21; Philemon 1:10-16; 1 Tim. 1:10).

What is Peter's main point:

- Slaves were to be subject to their masters, even those who were “unjust” or “crooked” and “dishonest.”
- As you think about how to apply this, while you are not in a slave/master relationship, these principles are relevant to all believers and can be applied to the other subordinate relationships in our lives, including employer relationships.

Before we dive into the two main reasons that Peter gives, let's briefly look at this phrase: “with all respect.”

- In the Greek, it literally says “with all fear.”
- In every instance of “fear” in 1 Peter, it is directed toward God, not humans (cf. 1:17; 3:2, 6, 14, 16; so Schreiner).
- “Respect” refers to a right *attitude*. That's not what Peter is after. He's calling slaves to submit because of their relationship to God (similar to 2:13).
- God, not the master, is the ultimate authority over slaves.
- So, just as with governing authorities, if masters commanded slaves to violate God's will, slaves should disobey, even if they have to face suffering.

Summary:

- Generally in most situations, slaves should be *inclined* to submit to and obey their masters, even unjust ones.
- Why? Peter then gives two main reasons:

1. “For this is a gracious thing” (18-20).

- This phrase is repeated at the beginning of 19 and end of 20, forming an inclusio.
- This phrase seems to be synonymous with “credit” implying that those who endure suffering while doing good will receive a reward from God.
- We’re not told exactly what this reward is (end-time salvation or other end-time rewards; 1:3-5) but what is clear is that God sees every injustice that you endure and it will be rewarded by him.

How do I receive this reward?

- “Mindful of God.”
 - We endure suffering with an awareness of God and an allegiance to him.
- “Enduring suffering for doing good”
 - If you do wrong and are punished, you have no reason to congratulate yourself. You are just getting what you deserved.
- The closest parallel to this in the NT is Jesus’ words in Luke 6:

“If you love those who love you, what benefit is that to you? For even sinners love those who love them. And if you do good to those who do good to you, what benefit is that to you? For even sinners do the same. And if you lend to those from whom you expect to receive, what credit is that to you? Even sinners lend to sinners, to get back the same amount. But love your enemies, and do good, and lend, expecting nothing in return, and your reward will be great, and you will be sons of the Most High, for he is kind to the ungrateful and the evil. Be merciful, even as your Father is merciful.” (Lk. 6:32-36 ESV)

- Our lives are to be windows to display the glory of God. When you face injustice, it’s an opportunity to display to the world how merciful God is. What makes us distinguishable from the world, is our love for enemies and sinners.
- You were once an enemy of God and you have received mercy. So, extend mercy.

Does this mean that injustice is ok?

- No! God hates injustice. We should speak up about injustice and strive to bring about justice in this world.

Does this mean that I cannot speak up about injustice?

- No. If someone is abusing you, speak up and get help. I’m going to get to this in a second, but what’s the opposite of “Love your enemies and do good?” It’s to respond with hate, evil, revenge and retaliation.

2. “For to this you have been called” (21-25).

- The second reason we are to endure injustice is because that is the example given to us by our savior. He suffered for “you.”
- If the pathway for Jesus involved unjust suffering, then his followers can expect the same.
- Suffering isn’t a detour. It’s a part of God’s plan.

What can we learn about Christ’s suffering (there are echoes of Isa. 53, the suffering servant):

- The quality of Christ’s suffering (22-23).
 - He committed no sin (he only did good)
 - Jesus never sinned (cf. Matt. 27:4; John 7:48; 8:29, 46; 18:38; 2 Cor. 5:21; Heb. 4:15; 1 John 3:5).
 - His suffering wasn’t for wrongdoing.
 - He didn’t threaten retaliation.
 - Jesus’ sinlessness wasn’t easily attained.
 - When someone does something to you that you don’t deserve, what’s your initial instinct and urge? Mine is for retaliation and revenge.
 - He entrusted his life to God, the just judge.
 - “Himself” is absent in the text. It is not specified. “Jesus kept ‘handing over’ to God every dimension of his life, including the fate of his enemies” (Tom Schreiner).
 - This is where our strength comes from.
 - God is a God of justice. Every wrong deed and act of injustice will either be paid for by the blood of Jesus or repaid to that person by God at the final judgment if they refuse to repent.

Bless those who persecute you; bless and do not curse them....Repay no one evil for evil, but give thought to do what is honorable in the sight of all. If possible, so far as it depends on you, live peaceably with all. Beloved, never avenge yourselves, but leave it to the wrath of God, for it is written, "Vengeance is mine, I will repay, says the Lord." To the contrary, "if your enemy is hungry, feed him; if he is thirsty, give him something to drink; for by so doing you will heap burning coals on his head." Do not be overcome by evil, but overcome evil with good. (Rom. 12:14, 17-21 ESV)

- Knowing this about God frees me to extend love and forgiveness, even to my enemies. The safest place for vengeance and retaliatory justice is in God’s hands.
- Jesus didn’t retaliate while on the cross. Think about it: crown of thorns, lashes on his back, nails in his hand and feet, spat upon, ridiculed, bearing the sin of sinners and the wrath of God. “...a moment of grave injustice, the sickest, most twisted moment in all human history” (Tim Challies). How does he respond? Does he say, “Father, strike them down!”? Nope. He says,

"Father, forgive them, for they know not what they do." (Lk. 23:34 ESV)

- Ills:
 - This past October, social media was a buzz with a young man's decision to forgive.
 - Amber Guyger, a woman police officer, shot and killed Botham Jean, an unarmed neighbor, and was sentenced to 10 years in prison.
 - Brandt Jean, Botham's younger brother, had this to say to Amber after she was sentenced: "I forgive you."

"If you truly are sorry, I can speak for myself, I forgive and I know if you go to God and ask him, he will forgive you....And I'm not gonna say I hope you rot and die just like my brother did but I presently want the best for you....And the best would be to give your life to Christ... Again I love you as a person and I don't wish anything bad on you."

- The result of Christ's suffering (24-25).
 - His suffering paid for our sins and brought us forgiveness.
 - "Tree": this is a reference to Deut. 21:23 where it says anyone who is hanged on a tree is cursed (cf. Gal. 3:13).
 - His suffering healed and freed us from sin.
 - Spiritually we have been healed as our sins have been paid for and forgiven.
 - We're also empowered to devote ourselves to living in a holy way.
 - His suffering has rescued us.
 - We are no longer lost sheep, but have returned to the Overseer and Shepherd (cf. Ezek. 34:6; Luke 15:4; John 10:2, 11, 12, 14; Eph. 4:11; 1 Tim: 3:2; Tit. 1:7).
 - Our ultimate ruler is not the emperor or masters, but Jesus.
- Jesus' death and suffering is unique and different than us in that he was sinless and he is the basis for our salvation.

Conclusion:

Implicitly, Peter is saying that your suffering can have the same effect on unbelievers. The moral goodness of your life can draw others to faith in Christ.

- That unbelievers may see your endurance in the faith of injustice and glorify God on the day of visitation.
- The way you respond to suffering can be a window displaying the glory of God.

It may seem like God is asking us to do the impossible. In a sense, you're right. Apart from God's wisdom, presence and power, you can't live this way. But with him, you can.